

March 2, 2020

Dearest Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh, Dearest Thầy,

The sun is shining and reflecting off the snow outside my window. A beautiful afternoon. I hope that you are well, happy, and at peace at this moment in your root temple in Huế.

Today Peaceful Heart Sangha celebrates our 12th continuation day. We are happy that you are with us! Thank you so so much for sharing the Buddha's teachings in a way that we can bring into our lives and for helping us to understand the importance of Beloved Community!

In my life I tend to learn with my heart. Thank you, Thầy, for sharing your clear understanding of the teachings in a way that I can absorb and feel deeply! In 1993 I discovered your teachings and right away found them to be so very helpful in my life in so many ways including coping with my mother's illness & death, dealing with my father and his abusive second wife, and helping my church community heal from inappropriate ministerial actions. In 2001 I attended my first retreat with you, received the Five Mindfulness Trainings, learned the importance of sangha, and experienced the healing power of walking meditation. When I returned home, I started a sangha, having no idea what I was doing. Five years later as an OI aspirant, I put my tiny shaky sangha on hold when I learned from Joanne Friday that there was a more solid experienced sangha that was only an hour from my home. I attended that nurturing sangha for nine months and then began our sangha anew.

Sangha practice and access to PV teachings, retreats, and Days of Mindfulness over the years have inspired many of us to offer classes and introductory meditation opportunities, to host monastics and lay Dharma Teachers for wonderful Days of Mindfulness and retreats, to offer church services on the 5MT, and to support fun Children and Teen's Mindfulness Practices when causes and conditions have allowed. We have practiced and shared Beginning Anew, both personal and sangha, and nurtured other sanghas by sharing Dharma Sharing guidelines and sometimes facilitating other sangha gatherings and Sangha Care meetings.

Thank you for Engaged Practice. In 2017 I was arrested for the first time in my life for peaceful protest (of a tax increase that we saw as harming the poor) in my US senator's office as I offered a Loving Kindness meditation with Moral Movement Maine, a group of multifaith leaders in Maine. In 2018 I was again arrested for peaceful protest as part of the Poor People's Campaign (a re-creation of a campaign started by Martin Luther King) trying to improve health care coverage, especially for 70,000 uncovered poor people in Maine. Less than a year later that change was made by our new governor! Yay!

Our world continues to struggle and our practice is needed more every day. May we each find ways to be helpful in our own small way every day – maybe a smile, a thank you, a pause and a breath before responding. One step at a time.

Thank you, dearest Thầy, with a bow of deepest respect and appreciation for your hard work and generous teachings,

Martha (Marty) Soule, Chân Quang Độ, True Land of Light

And members of the Peaceful Heart Sangha, Augusta, Maine, USA